

REVELATION, PART 3

Acts 10.23b-33

Last week, we left the story of the encounter between Peter and Cornelius with Peter welcoming the men sent from Cornelius into the home where he was staying in Joppa to spend the night.

In the morning, the men set out for Caesarea. It had been three days since Cornelius had his vision, and it is the day after God taught Peter a lesson that he struggled to understand until the men from Cornelius explained their visit.

As soon as preparations are made, Peter and his traveling companions, now nine in number counting the three men from Caesarea and the six men from Joppa who accompanied Peter (*Acts 11.12*) set out on their journey.

From what we know of the story, there was no hesitation on Peter's part to go to Caesarea. The angel had told him not to doubt what he heard from these men sent by Cornelius. He had seen and learned much since the resurrection and knew that, once the will of God is understood, there is nothing for the disciple to do but to respond.

Whatever challenges may follow our obedience to God's will are in His providence. For those who love God and who are called to His purpose, all things will work out for the good of the kingdom and for the glory of God.

As we see so often in the Bible, man's free will decision is simply the way that God accomplishes His mission. Peter may be going to Caesarea freely, but he made his decision based on the will and the call of God.

The track they followed to Caesarea was a well-traveled highway that ran north along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. Caesarea was a port city and many goods were carried there to be shipped to all parts of the Roman Empire. So the roads were probably filled with travelers.

They arrived at the home of Cornelius the next morning – the fourth day of the story.

While Peter and his companions were traveling, Cornelius had been busy. *Verse 24* indicates that his house was full of family and friends, all waiting in great anticipation for the arrival of the messenger from Joppa.

Cornelius was already in the mode of evangelism. Remember that the angel had explained that when Peter arrived, he would “tell you words whereby you and all your house shall be saved.” (*Acts 11.14*)

What we see in this story is a literal application of Jesus' command to “Go make disciples.”

Peter went to see Cornelius, but Cornelius intended for everyone he knew to have the opportunity to hear the gospel message.

It is not wise to take a singular case from the Bible and create doctrine from it. But when there is an apparent pattern in the way we see God work among men, then we can formulate our doctrine accordingly.

Several times in the book of Acts we read...

- Acts 2:39
- Acts 2:47
- Acts 5:14
- Acts 13:48
- Acts 14:27
- Acts 15:13-18

God had already prepared the heart of the Ethiopian eunuch before God ever directed Philip to go meet the eunuch on the road to his home. At just the right moment, God brought Philip into his path to share the message of Christ and lead him to a profession of faith.

In this story, we see that God had already prepared the heart of Cornelius to hear and to respond to the Gospel message. Furthermore, by the testimony of Cornelius, God had already worked in the hearts of those of his household and among his friends so that they, too, would respond positively to the word as preached by Peter.

It might help to understand this more fully by contrasting the stories of some who, though appearing to be righteous on the outside, were never converted in their hearts.

Rich young ruler. (Luke 18.18-23)

This man came to Jesus asking how he might inherit eternal life. But his response to Jesus' answer proved his meaning and his motive. He was seeking a way that he himself could gain eternal life. He wasn't seeking to surrender to the lordship of Christ. He came to Jesus of his own will and by his own desire for the gifts of God. He walked away disappointed.

Simon Magus. (Acts 8.9-23)

The Bible says that Simon both believed and was baptized, but apparently, he never experienced the Holy Spirit. When the Holy Spirit came on the people of Samaria, Simon sought to use his own resources to purchase the gifts of righteousness that the other Samaritans had received by their conversion. Peter replied in anger, stating that Simon remained in "the bond of iniquity."

In this encounter between Peter and Cornelius, God had opened the doorway of faith to men of all nations – of all people groups. He works through people to reach other people, but those who are obedient must always recognize that what happens as a result of our faithfulness is actually the work of God as Paul said in...

Rom. 15:18 Yet I dare not boast about anything except what Christ has done through me, bringing the Gentiles to God by my message and by the way I worked among them.

In **verse 25**, as Peter approached the house, Cornelius was so excited about the prospect of being saved that he fell down and worshipped Peter, even before Peter could utter a greeting.

The word "worshipped" here may mean to worship spiritually in the sense of worshipping a deity. But it may also refer to honoring someone or giving homage to someone of superior ranking.

That is the sense of the word as it is used here. Among the Greeks and the Romans, such an action was typically reserved for the gods. But Cornelius was a devout man, one who feared and worshipped God. He would most certainly have been aware that no man was worthy of his religious adoration.

One commentator said that Cornelius' passion for the worship of God caused him to fail to "sever the preacher from the truth he was sent to make known." (William Kelly, 1869) Certainly all of us are guilty of such a response to some degree. We all hold in high regards the person or persons who were instrumental in our coming to know Christ as Savior.

What made this moment even more remarkable – imagine all of the witnesses who were watching this moment – was that Cornelius was a Roman army officer – a member of the army of a conquering nation.

Peter knew very little about Cornelius, other than the fact that he was a Roman who worshipped the God of Israel. Unsure of Cornelius' motives, Peter reached down and took him by the arms, lifted him to his feet, and declared, "Stand up. I myself also am a man."

Peter knew that he was unworthy of worship – that he was simply a servant of God – and was undeserving of any acknowledgment or homage. He knew that if there was any glory due anyone or anything it was to God and His word.

The preliminary greetings having been taken care of, Cornelius directed Peter to enter his home.

I am not sure what Peter expected, but upon entering the house, Peter “found many that were come together (v. 27).”

(Story of Shockley in Romania.)

Since these were the family and friends of Cornelius, you have to imagine that most of them were not Jewish. Peter at once greeted the assembly by explaining what had brought him there.

In the first half of **verse 28**, Peter explained to them, “It is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation.”

If you go back and study the commandments God gave to Israel, you will discover that there was never any such law given by God. The Law of separation – the law of holiness and sanctification – the law of distinction, not distance – had been so applied by the Jews that it had become the custom of the nation with the force of law.

In other words, a misunderstanding and misapplication of the law of God by the Jews had, at first been only tradition, then had become custom, then had become accepted as the truth.

Anytime we allow tradition to have the force of doctrine, we are operating outside of the truth of God. It may be painful to overcome such well-entrenched habits, but the holiness of God’s truth demands it.

Then, in the second half of **verse 28**, Peter expresses how his life and his heart had been forever changed by the vision that God had allowed him to have on the rooftop in Joppa.

Peter came to realize that the laws God had given Israel related to clean and unclean were never meant to apply to men. He realized that his problem had not been a problem of propriety, but one of prejudice.

Suddenly, the wall between Jew and Gentile crumbled before him. Finally, Peter understood that God had never intended there to be a wall of separation between the Jewish nation and those of other

nations – that salvation did not belong to one people, but to men of all nations. He was finally beginning to understand what Jesus meant by making disciples of “all nations – all people groups” and being His witness “to the ends of the earth.”

Peter wants these people before him to understand that he did not come to the home of Cornelius out of the desire of his own heart because to do so would render him unclean to his own people.

He is there because God had taught him a valuable lesson and by that lesson had compelled him to come.

Acts 10:29 *Therefore when I was sent for, I came without hesitation or objection or misgivings.*

God corrected my theology, Cornelius called me here, “so now I ask for what reason you sent for me.”

In light of everything that has transpired, it seems a strange question for Peter to ask. The men Cornelius had sent had told him some of what had happened four days earlier – about Cornelius’s encounter with the angel – but now Peter called on Cornelius to explain it to everyone assembled together.

Many times I have heard people say, “I don’t witness to people about Christ or getting saved because I don’t know what to say or how to get the conversation started.”

Sometimes, we take too much upon ourselves. Here is one way to get the conversation started – ask them about their relationship with God? The truth will become obvious almost immediately.

Cornelius at once revealed all that had transpired that day when the angel appeared during his prayer time. Then, he said to Peter in **verse 33**, “You have done a very kind thing for us by coming. Now, we stand prepared to hear all that God has given you to say to us today.”

Cornelius said, “You have done a good thing by coming.”

And we do a good thing by going.

If there is anything we should learn from *Radical* it is that God has called all Christians to go – to make disciples as part of your everyday life ventures.

I know that reading what someone else has written can be a sermon killer at times. But there is so much in this week's lesson that we need to hear that I felt it necessary to remind you of some things David Platt said in Chapter 5:

...the plan of Christ is not dependent on having the right programs or hiring the right professionals but on building and being the right people – a community of people – who realize that we are all enabled and equipped to carry out the purpose of God for our lives.

When you think about it, the fact that we lack a clear understanding about what it means to make disciples is astounding. This is the last command we have from Jesus to his followers before he left the earth. It is the central mission that Christ gave to his church before going to heaven. Yet if you were to ask individual Christians what it means to make disciples, you would likely get jumbled thoughts, ambiguous answers, and probably even some blank stares.

Making disciples is not an easy process. It is trying. It is messy. It is slow, tedious, even painful at times. It is all these things because it is relational.

Disciple making is not a call for others to come to us to hear the gospel but a command for us to go to others to share the gospel. A command for us to be gospel-living, gospel-speaking people at every moment and in every context where we find ourselves.

...disciple making involves identifying with a community of believers who show love to one another and share life with one another as we live together for the glory of God.

In our Christian version of the American dream, our plan ends up disinfecting Christians from the world more than discipling Christians in the world.

When we gather at the building (the church), we learn to be good. Being good is defined by what we avoid in the world. We are holy because of what we don't participate in (and at this point we may be the only organization in the world defining success by what we don't do).

Disciple making takes place multiple times every week in multiple locations by an army of men and women sharing, showing, and teaching the Word of Christ and together serving a world in need of Christ. All of a sudden, holiness is defined by what we do.

Christ promised that He would build His church.

He will convert the Corneliuses with whom we come into contact every day.

We must simply go.